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**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, ABC Radio Perth, *Drive with Jamie Burnett*, Friday 6 April 2018

**Subject:** Recognising the long career paths of doctors

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**JAMIE BURNETT:** Dr Michael Gannon is the President of the AMA. Good afternoon to you.

**DR MICHAEL GANNON:** Good afternoon, Jamie.

**JAMIE BURNETT:** Is this an area that the AMA has looked at before, re-testing of doctors when they get to a certain age?

**DR MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, certainly we told the medical board, we told AHPRA, the overarching regulator, what we thought about their proposals in this area. It's an issue that's come up around the AMA table many times in the past. Retired doctors don't like giving up their ability to write prescriptions, to write referrals for themselves or family members. That's not always appropriate, especially if they're making clinical judgements well outside their area of practice.

So we're not overly threatened by the results of this study. And we certainly think the medical board, having listened to our arguments, probably found the sweet spot in maintaining the ability for doctors to continue to practice, while recognising that maybe their practice needs slightly greater scrutiny.

**JAMIE BURNETT:** How does it work currently? Are there certain times, or after a length of time, that doctors have to go back and sit a test or go back and revise where things are at?

**DR MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, that's a fabulous question. Because what we saw the General Medical Council, the regulator in Britain, do was introduce a process of revalidation, where doctors literally had to go back and do their exams. I will say without one skerrick of evidence that it actually helps protect patients, that it makes them better doctors. So we made very clear undertakings when that word, revalidation, was raised in the Australian context, that we wanted to see things, that there was an evidence base, that it worked.

We're pleased that this study seems to support the common sense middle ground that the medical board has found. Recognising that doctors' abilities, overall, a bit like everyone else in society, do start to wane with advancing age, and that the public is worthy of a degree of protection. The doctors do need a degree of scrutiny as they go past 70 years of age.

**JAMIE BURNETT:** It's 28 past four. You're listening to Dr Michael Gannon, the President of the Australian Medical Association. This might not be a question best directed to you, Michael Gannon, but do we know what proportion of doctors are aged over that 65 year mark?

**DR MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, certainly we know it's increasing. And that's not surprising either. The statistics are quite amazing: if you're still alive at age 56, well then your life expectancy is another 35 years, one of the triumphs of medical science. I heard in your introduction that other doctors are being told they need to work longer. And, so many doctors over the age of 70 still have so much to give. They've got all that experience, many of them are practicing at a very, very high level. And, even if they are seeing fewer patients they have so much to offer in terms of mentorship, training, and that's whether we're talking about medical students, residents or registrars. Or, whether we're talking about the huge amount of training that doctors impart to other health professionals, whether they be nurses, midwives and physios. It's part of the oath, it's part of what we do.

**JAMIE BURNETT:** It's a good point and it's one that's not left just to the medical area as well. The importance of experience, the importance of mentorship as well. Is there a strong culture of that? Of doctors passing on to the younger ones coming through?

**DR MICHAEL GANNON:** Oh, very much so. I've referred to the Hippocratic tradition. The word doctor means teacher and it's something that we do at every level of our time in the workforce. Registrars train interns and residents. Consultants train registrars, and senior consultants hopefully mentor junior consultants. Whether that's within public hospital units or whether that's within the private sector, whether that's in the community setting where more experienced GPs guide younger GPs as they make their way. So, we're not threatened by these results at all. I think we've always known that surgeons and other proceduralists, their abilities diminish with time. I think there's a lot greater understanding that those medical specialists that rely more on their intellect, on their cognition, like physicians, like GPs, like psychiatrists, those abilities can also diminish with time. So we've got no argument with protecting the public and these regulations as they exist maintain the ability of doctors who are still healthy and still meeting the required standard working into their seventies.

**JAMIE BURNETT:** Michael Gannon, a cheeky question to finish: have you had a think about how long you'd like to keep the coat on for?

**DR MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, I think about this a lot. Because I've had a leadership role in the medical profession very much mid-career and, I think a lot about how many years I've got to go in the job. I think that there's no doubt that things change. My craft requires me to get out of bed in the middle of the night...

**JAMIE BURNETT:** Yeah. [Laughs]

**DR MICHAEL GANNON:** ...and my ability to do that, and maintain a smile on my face has diminished over the years.

**JAMIE BURNETT:** Yeah. Well, we hope it's got a while to run yet. Appreciate your time today. Thank you.

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